


THE MANITOBA HABITAT HERITAGE CORPORATION



A N N U A L   R E P O R T   2 0 0 6 / 2 0 0 7



Cover Photo: purple finch  
This Page: Wilson's snipe

Wildlife images (cover, inside cover and pages 2, 5, 24) in this report are supplied by Fred Greenslade, an internationally acclaimed wildlife photographer who lives in Portage la Prairie and captures many of his images in Manitoba's famed Delta Marsh.

## **BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR HABITAT CONSERVATION**

The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation is a non-profit Crown Corporation established in 1986 by the *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* and is responsible to the Manitoba Minister of Water Stewardship.

Its objective is to work in partnership with public and private agencies and organizations as well as individual landowners to conserve, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat in Manitoba.

The Honourable Christine Melnick  
Minister of Water Stewardship  
Legislative Building  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

The year that ended March 31, 2007 was highlighted by continued progress in conservation by The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation.

With heightened awareness of water issues and the need to restore Lake Winnipeg water quality, MHHC's new riparian conservation agreement (easement) initiative focusing on the Red River and the Lake Winnipeg watershed is being well received by landowners. In 2006/07 MHHC targeted critical areas along the Red River with considerable success.

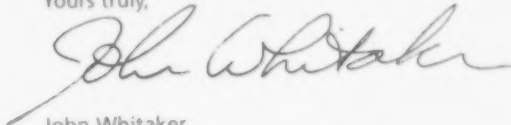
Implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) continues, with 2006 representing the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the NAWMP agreement. Recognized by many as the most successful wildlife conservation partnership on the continent, Manitoba remains a priority area for NAWMP program delivery.

MHHC's involvement in riparian areas goes beyond conservation agreements. Its *Managing the Water's Edge* initiative offers landowners and other land managers useful information on sustainable use of riparian and associated lands. Requests for workshops and presentations more than doubled over the previous year. MHHC staff also provided riparian area assessment input into watershed planning efforts across the province.

MHHC continues to deliver conservation agreements on important habitats identified for species at risk. This conservation tool has been well received by landowners.

This is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MHHC. Looking back, it is clear that MHHC has carved out a unique role and has become an effective force for incentive and information based habitat conservation in Manitoba. Looking forward, we anticipate a bright future.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Whitaker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

John Whitaker  
Chairperson

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## MANDATE AND ROLES

Established by the *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* of 1986, The Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation's (MHHC) mandate is conservation, restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat in the province of Manitoba. This is achieved through partnerships with private landowners, farm organizations, conservation groups, corporations and government agencies. While its mandate is broad, MHHC programming focuses on private land in the agricultural region of Manitoba. MHHC promotes conservation practices that enhance wildlife habitat, encourage productive uses of the land and help to sustain farm family income.

MHHC conducts activities under three major program areas.



### North American Waterfowl Management Plan

MHHC coordinates North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) implementation in Manitoba in partnership with other agencies and organizations. It also directly delivers NAWMP activities in partnership with Delta Waterfowl Foundation through the Potholes Plus Program. The emphasis is on conserving and enhancing wetland and associated habitats.



### Riparian Habitat Management

Riparian habitat, found along streambanks, lakeshores and wetlands, is rich in biodiversity and contributes to water quality. MHHC programs encourage landowners to adopt land use practices that protect this important habitat, support water quality objectives and sustain agricultural productivity, particularly for livestock.



### Species At Risk

MHHC delivers voluntary habitat securement programs for species at risk, with a focus on mixed-grass prairie and riparian habitats, as well as specific habitats of importance for species of concern.

In addition to its program areas, MHHC receives donations of land and conservation agreements (easements) from private landowners.

## MHHC LAND CONSERVATION SUMMARY

The agricultural region of Manitoba, which has been intensively developed for crop and livestock production, remains an important

region for wildlife. MHHC's overall objective - conserving habitat important to a wide array of plants, birds, land animals, fish and other aquatic animals - is achieved through cooperative agreements, easements, leases and, in some cases, land ownership.

MHHC's land conservation activity summary is found in Table 1. It highlights the cumulative accomplishments of MHHC and includes purchased and donated lands, conservation agreements, leases and cooperative management agreements with landowners. To date, nearly 3,000 agreements with landowners, conservation agencies and other organizations have been implemented. As of March 31, 2007, MHHC's cumulative activities had conserved or influenced 206,590 acres of habitat.

**Table 1: MHHC Land Conservation Activity Summary<sup>1</sup> to March 31, 2007**

	# sites	# acres
<b>Acquired and Donated Lands</b>		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	35	7,910
Critical Wildlife Habitat Program <sup>2</sup>	22	4,217
Lands held in title by MHHC	57	12,127
<b>Conservation Agreements</b>		
Potholes Plus	183	26,925
Habitat Stewardship Program	107	23,315
Riparian Habitat	10	861
Other Agreements	14	2,489
Donated Agreements	21	2,149
Conservation Agreements held by MHHC	335	55,739
<b>Leased Lands (cumulative acreage)<sup>3</sup></b>		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	204	19,137
Critical Wildlife Habitat Program	121	18,501
Leases held by MHHC	325	37,638
<b>Cooperative Agreements</b>		
North American Waterfowl Management Plan	683	8,146
Riparian Stewardship Projects	231	59,020
Manitoba Agro Woodlot Program (to March 31, 2005) <sup>4</sup>	1,207	33,920
Cooperative Agreements held by MHHC	2,121	101,086
<b>Total, to March 31, 2007</b>	<b>2,838</b>	<b>206,590</b>

<sup>1</sup> This table summarizes MHHC's cumulative accomplishments and includes activities that are still active as well as those that are no longer under agreement.

<sup>2</sup> Includes lands that are held by MHHC in trust on behalf of CWHP partners.

<sup>3</sup> Includes current and lapsed leases and cooperative agreements.

<sup>4</sup> MHHC delivered this program from 1992 to 2005.



## MANDATE AND ROLES

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## Board of Directors

The *Manitoba Habitat Heritage Act* of 1986 requires MHHC to be governed by a Board of Directors responsible to the Manitoba Minister of Water Stewardship.

As of March 31, 2007 the MHHC Board consisted of 10 members:

John Whitaker*, Chairperson	Citizen Representative
Don Norquay* (Vice Chair)	Manitoba Water Stewardship
Bob Grant	Ducks Unlimited Canada
Murray Dubowits	Citizen Representative
Cornie Goertzen*	Manitoba Conservation Districts Association
Michael Kingdon	Keystone Agricultural Producers
Roger Wilson	Association of Manitoba Municipalities
Patrick Rakowski*	Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
Robert Olson	Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Barry Todd	Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

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## Ex officio Members

Deanna Dixon	Prairie Habitat Joint Venture
Jack Dubois	Manitoba Conservation
Mike Moore	Nature Conservancy of Canada
Lawrie Hilton	Manitoba Wildlife Federation (Habitat Trust)
Jim Tokarchuk	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration)
Brian Sterling	The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association

\*Executive Committee Member

The MHHC board conducted three meetings in 2006/07 as well as one field tour of MHHC projects.



## North American Waterfowl Management Plan

*The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) is a conservation partnership that operates in Canada, the United States and Mexico. The Plan, built on sound biological principles and the best science available, is designed to influence large areas of the landscape rather than simply concentrate on any one species or site.*

*MHHC coordinates NAWMP activities in Manitoba in cooperation with several funding partners and public and private program delivery partners. Activities target the "Prairie Pothole" region of southwestern Manitoba, emphasizing conservation and enhancement of wetland and associated habitats. Potholes Plus is an apt name for the NAWMP program that MHHC delivers in conjunction with the Delta Waterfowl Foundation. MHHC also provides coordination, communication, reporting and evaluation services to the partnership.*



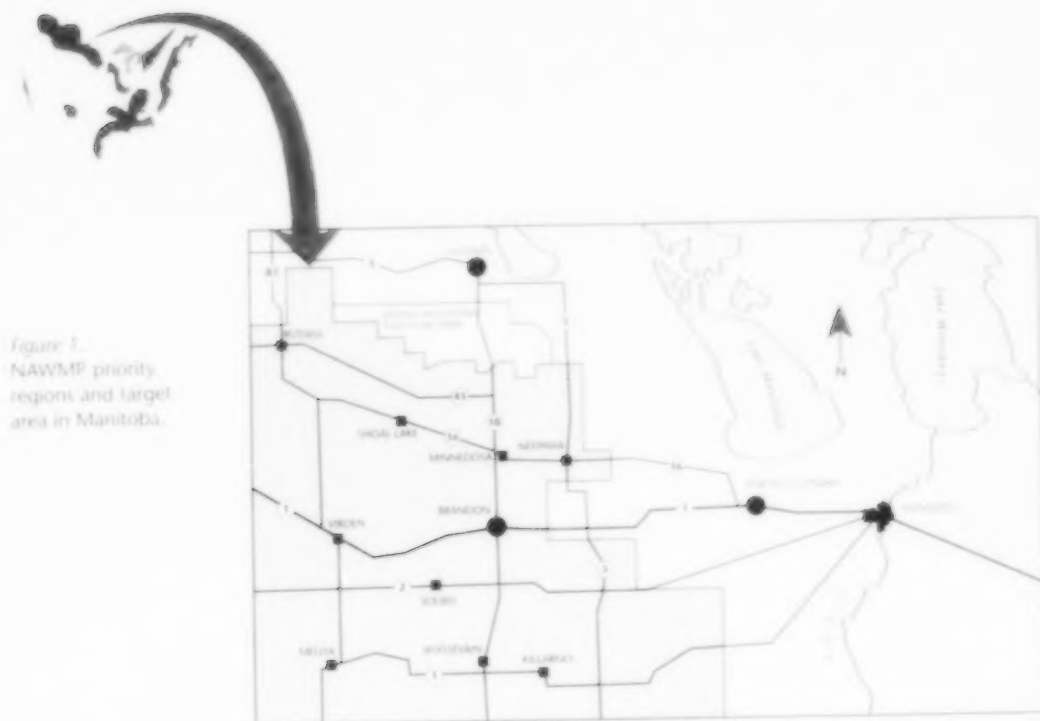


Figure 1.  
NAWMP priority  
regions and target  
area in Manitoba.

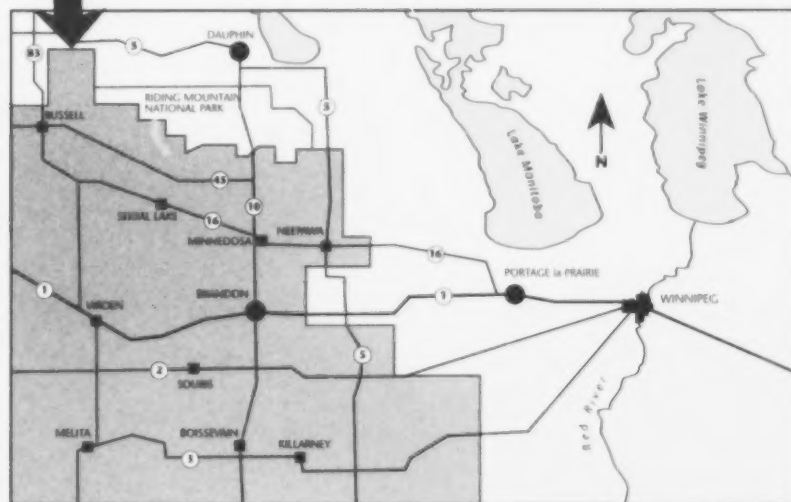
The NAWMP began in 1986 as a written agreement between the governments of Canada and the United States, and was joined later by the Government of Mexico. The success of this continental initiative focused on waterfowl population recovery is evident by its longevity, the thousands of partnerships established and in the millions of acres conserved and influenced in Canada, the United States and Mexico.

North America's most important waterfowl breeding habitats lie within the Great Plains region that includes the prairie and aspen parkland regions of southern Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. These habitats provide critical nesting areas and migration stopover sites for much of the continent's duck population and are recognized as one of the highest priorities for waterfowl conservation. Here, NAWMP activities are coordinated under the Prairie

Habitat Joint Venture. Figure 1 shows the prairie path area of southwestern Manitoba, the main area of the province in which NAWMP activities are conducted.

Program planning and accomplishments in Manitoba complement broader continental efforts. NAWMP partners across North America influence all types of habitats used by waterfowl including breeding grounds, migration resting sites and wintering areas. NAWMP success in Manitoba is demonstrated by the thousands of acres that have been affected by its programs, some through long-term conservation agreements and others by information and incentive programs that stimulated adoption of conservation farming activities. This has been made possible by the investment of \$122.43 million in conservation activities in this province, 87 per cent of which has been contributed by public and private sources from outside the province.

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The highest priority habitats for conservation are predominantly located on privately owned farmland. Accordingly, NAWMP partners offer voluntary conservation options that provide landowners alternative income sources from their lands while conserving habitat. Ongoing program acceptance depends on maintaining positive relationships with individual landowners and community-based organizations, including local farm groups, conservation districts, wildlife associations and rural municipalities.

A broad-based partnership is at the core of NAWMP, reflecting agricultural, conservation and rural land-use interests. MHHC partners in Manitoba include:

Agriculture Canada (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration)  
Delta Waterfowl Foundation  
Ducks Unlimited Canada  
Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)  
Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives  
Manitoba Conservation  
Manitoba Water Stewardship  
Keystone Agricultural Producers  
Association of Manitoba Municipalities  
Manitoba Cattle Producers Association  
Conservation Districts  
Nature Conservancy of Canada

## A MANITOBA NAWMP OVERVIEW

MHHC tracks land areas that are secured by NAWMP partners as well as those influenced by conservation

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### CATEGORIES OF CONSERVATION ACTIVITY:

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**Secured:** Any habitat conserved through an agreement of seven years or more. May include lease, purchase, long-term management agreement or conservation agreement.

**Influenced:** Any land that is owned by individuals who have been encouraged to use conservation farming practices.

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land use activities. "Secured" habitat is habitat conserved through an agreement of seven years or more. It may include lease, purchase, long-term management agreement or conservation agreement. "Influenced" land is land owned by individuals who have been encouraged to use conservation farming practices. Also note that the numbers represent cumulative activities that have occurred since NAWMP inception, including lands for which cooperative agreements have lapsed.

In 2006/07, NAWMP partners added another 21,764 acres of secured wildlife habitat lands, bringing the cumulative total to 355,997 acres since NAWMP inception. The total area of land influenced by all NAWMP activities rose to 1,662,208 acres.

The NAWMP influences a broad range of habitat types in Manitoba. These include:

- Wetlands ranging from tiny prairie potholes to large staging marshes
- Wetlands, previously drained, that have been restored
- Upland habitats such as grasslands, shrublands and aspen parklands
- Cultivated marginal lands converted to permanent grass and forage cover
- Rangelands improved for both livestock and wildlife through managed grazing and livestock watering practices
- Haylands managed as productive wildlife habitat
- Conventionally tilled fields converted to zero-tillage and winter cereal croplands

These habitats and land use practices provide breeding areas for waterfowl and support a great diversity of other bird species as well as mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

Table 2: NAWMP Activity Summary\* to March 31, 2007 (Acres)

	Green Acres	DU Program - NAWMP	Nature Conservancy of Canada	Potholes Plus	HELP**	NAWMP Total
Secured 2006/07	756	13,449	1,902	5,657***	—	21,764
Before 2006/07	37,125	234,866	20,503	30,904	10,835	334,233
<b>Total Secured</b>	<b>37,881</b>	<b>248,315</b>	<b>22,405</b>	<b>36,561</b>	<b>10,835</b>	<b>355,997</b>
Influenced Lands 2006/07		39,998				39,998
Before 2006/07	20,580	1,242,106		3,527		1,266,213
<b>Total Influenced</b>	<b>20,580</b>	<b>1,282,104</b>		<b>3,527</b>		<b>1,306,211</b>
<b>Program Totals</b>	<b>58,461</b>	<b>1,530,419</b>	<b>22,405</b>	<b>40,088</b>	<b>10,835</b>	<b>1,662,208</b>

\* Includes lands under agreement as well as previously secured lands or activities where agreements have lapsed

\*\* Habitat Enhancement Land use Program

\*\*\* Includes Turtle Mountain Conservation District and Highways Mitigation CAs

Table 3: NAWMP Financial Contributions

Agency	1986 to March 31, 2007	Percentage
<b>Manitoba Sources</b>	<b>\$16,034,027</b>	<b>13.1</b>
<b>Other Canadian Sources</b>		
Canadian Wildlife Service	\$16,397,929	13.4
Wildlife Habitat Canada	885,300	0.7
Ducks Unlimited Canada	2,545,000	2.1
<b>Total Other Canadian Sources</b>	<b>\$19,828,229</b>	<b>16.2</b>
<b>Total Canadian Sources</b>	<b>\$35,862,256</b>	<b>29.3</b>
<b>US Sources</b>		<b>0.0</b>
Delta Waterfowl Foundation	\$5,873,291	4.8
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.	30,794,960	25.2
US Fish and Wildlife Service	35,565,579	29.1
US States	10,591,035	8.7
Nature Conservancy of Canada	3,743,078	3.1
<b>Total US Sources</b>	<b>\$86,567,943</b>	<b>70.7</b>
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$122,430,199</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Within NAWMP, MHHC also provides field delivery services, coordination, communications, evaluation and planning activities. These services were supported in 2006/07 with funding from three major sources:

- Manitoba Conservation
- Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
- U.S. North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), through the Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Financial and in-kind support was also received from a number of other partners.

## **MHHC NAWMP ACTIVITIES**

### ***Potholes Plus Program***

MHHC's NAWMP field delivery emphasizes the use of conservation agreements (easements) to conserve wetland and associated habitat on private, agricultural land. MHHC may also purchase or acquire donated lands and it conducts waterfowl enhancement and management activities on some of its secured habitats.

*Conservation Agreements:* Since the proclamation of the *Conservation Agreements Act* by the Manitoba Government in 1998, conservation agreements (CAs) have become a flexible option for protecting habitat on private land. Essentially an easement, a CA enables a recognized conservation agency or organization to enter into an agreement with a landowner to protect habitat. The agreement is recorded on the land title and remains in force with a transfer of ownership. Many CAs acquired by MHHC continue to be used for agricultural activities such as haying and grazing as long as the natural values are protected. All MHHC agreements are held in perpetuity.

Under NAWMP, MHHC delivers all of its purchased CAs through the Potholes Plus Program, a partnership with the Delta Waterfowl Foundation. MHHC holds all acquired CAs. In 2006/07 a total of 22 CAs, covering 4,586 acres, were acquired. Since inception, 183 CAs, covering of 26,925 acres have been secured through the Potholes Plus program. An additional 19 Potholes Plus CAs were in process at year end.

*Conservation Agreement Baseline Inventory and Monitoring:* MHHC conducts baseline inventories of CAs it secures within two years of the finalization of the CA. In 2006/07, a two-person field team contacted landowners, collected data and completed reports on 62 CAs, totaling 10,750 acres. The inventory collects basic biological information and collects a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) reference of the boundaries of all habitat parcels in the CA.

MHHC also conducts annual monitoring of all CAs, using a combination of ground and aerial inspections to identify any possible violations of the agreements. In 2006/07 one CA violation was encountered and was dealt with. MHHC staff also attempt to contact every CA landowner at least once a year.

### ***Green Acres***

Prior to the Potholes Plus Program, MHHC's NAWMP activities were delivered through its Green Acres Program. Activities like habitat leasing that were significant under the Green Acres program are no longer carried out but MHHC continues to record donated lands and CAs under this NAWMP program. MHHC has acquired and owns 35 parcels of land, totaling 7,910 acres, through purchase or donation. No purchases were completed in 2006/07, but four donated parcels of land, totaling 560 acres were



received this year. A total of 21 CAs, totaling 2,149 acres have been donated to MHHC to date and two CAs totaling 196 acres were received this year. An additional five CA donations were in process at year end.

MHHC's donated lands and CAs include a variety of wetland, woodland, riparian and other native habitats across the province.

Of the 204 habitat leases (19,137 acres secured) that were signed in prior years, four leases remained active in 2006/07. No new leases were signed this year, which is consistent with MHHC's focus on permanent securement activities, especially CAs.

*Land Management:* Lands acquired by MHHC require ongoing monitoring and management. In addition to site inspections, 23 parcels received some management treatment in 2006/07. Specific activities included:

- hay leases
- grazing management systems for grassland management purposes
- land where weed control was conducted
- permanent cover re-seeded

As much as possible, land management activities are conducted with the cooperation of neighbouring agricultural producers.

*Waterfowl Nest Tunnel Program:* MHHC has established and/or maintains 1,763 nesting tunnels across southern Manitoba. That includes 485 Delta Waterfowl Foundation structures that MHHC now manages by agreement with the Foundation. Through that agreement, 186 new structures were placed in project wetlands in 2006/07. Those tunnels were placed primarily on existing Potholes Plus CAs to enhance waterfowl

nesting success. Annual spring inspections of each tunnel include routine maintenance and lining each one with new nesting material.

Waterfowl nesting success, which can be lower than 10 per cent for ducks nesting on the ground, will reach as high as 90 per cent for mallards that nest in tunnels. As well, wetlands secured through the nest tunnel program also provide benefits to more than 100 other wildlife species.

## SPECIAL NAWMP PROJECTS

*NAWMP Implementation Plan:* MHHC is coordinating efforts in Manitoba to develop a new, 25-year implementation plan for NAWMP in Manitoba as part of a larger planning effort, under the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture, in the Great Plains region of western Canada.

*Highways Mitigation Project:* The loss of wetland habitat resulting from the twinning of the Trans Canada Highway west of Elkhorn Manitoba is being addressed through a special mitigation agreement between Manitoba Transportation and Government Services, Manitoba Conservation and MHHC. MHHC is coordinating and delivering the conservation and restoration of wetlands and associated habitat.

MHHC will secure perpetual conservation agreements for this project. It has also established a partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada, which will undertake all associated wetland restoration. To date a total of 1,095 acres of wetland and associated upland habitat have been secured and 18 acres of wetlands have been restored. In 2006/07, a total of 416 acres of mitigation habitats were secured under this agreement.

## Conservation Agreements: A Reader's Digest Version

The conservation agreement (CA) is the primary tool used by MHHC for long-term habitat securement in the agricultural landscape. What is it?

In Manitoba, the term conservation agreement is synonymous with what are called conservation easements in other jurisdictions. Regardless of the name, it is a means by which habitat on private land can be protected without the land having to change hands. Prior to 1998, when the Conservation Agreements Act was passed, purchasing land was the only way for conservation agencies to effect long term protection of private land habitat.

When a landowner signs a CA the land is not sold. Rather, some of the land rights applying to the habitat under agreement are transferred to the CA holder. The CA ensures that the habitat will be protected, regardless of who owns the lands, for as long as the CA is in force. All other rights of ownership remain with the landowner, who continues to control access and use the land, subject to the provisions of the CA. Adjacent portions of the property that are not part of the CA have no restrictions placed on them.

CAs can be applied to habitats like wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, riparian areas without having any effect on cultivated lands. Most of MHHC's CAs have "no-break/no-drain" restrictions, which means that activities such as haying, grazing, hunting and trapping are not affected. Because CAs are registered on the land title, they remain in force as long as the term of the CA. All MHHC CAs have been signed in perpetuity.

Landowner response has been positive. MHHC has signed up 335 CAs, totalling 55,739 acres to March 31, 2007. Surveys of CA landowners have shown that 92% would still sign a CA with MHHC and 88% would recommend it to their friends and neighbours.



## Payments To Landowners In The Millions

Since MHHC began delivering CAs in 1999, payments to landowners for CAs have reached \$4.136 million. Those are conservation program funds that have gone directly to landowners who have made long-term habitat conservation commitments.

MHHC's CA funding comes from a number of sources in Canada and the United States and for a range of habitats: wetlands, wetland fringes, grasslands, woodlands, riparian areas, and habitats for species at risk.

Using CAs, landowners can draw some capital from their operation without having to sell property or other assets associated with farm production. Many have applied CA funds to improvements in their farm operations like establishment of permanent cover and grazing management systems



Paying landowners for conservation of habitat is consistent with "ecological goods and services" concept: the idea that landowners should be recognized financially for the ecological "services" – biodiversity, clean water, soil conservation and carbon storage to name a few – that they maintain when they make the conscious decision to conserve habitat. Through its funding partners, MHHC has transferred significant funds directly to farmers to support their habitat conservation decisions.



## NAWMP Implementation Plan

MHHC is coordinating a process to develop a new, 25-year implementation plan for NAWMP in Manitoba. Much has changed since the last Manitoba Implementation Plan was completed in 1997 and the first one was inked in 1988.

A recent analysis of the state of waterfowl habitat in Manitoba identified widespread conversion of croplands to hay and pasture in the 1990s as a benefit to waterfowl. However, wetland loss continues at an alarming rate and is the most significant landscape influence on waterfowl productivity. A recently completed study by Environment Canada estimated 7.1 percent wetland loss in the 1971-2000 period.

A new computer planning tool – the Waterfowl Productivity Model (WPM) – is a major assist that helps NAWMP partners predict waterfowl productivity changes in specific areas based on gains or losses of wetlands, native upland habitats and agricultural lands. The WPM estimates waterfowl productivity from existing landscape conditions as well as different land use scenarios to help NAWMP delivery agencies determine the mix of land use practices they should promote in a given area.

With the goal of landscape conditions that can support waterfowl populations at the levels experienced in the 1970s, this planning initiative is helping NAWMP partners understand how much can be achieved directly through NAWMP programs, as well as what will be required through land use adjustments from conservation-friendly agricultural extension programs and agricultural policy shifts.

The first five year plan will be completed in 2007/08. Agencies represented on the working group include: Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Environment Canada, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Manitoba Conservation, Nature Conservancy of Canada and Manitoba Water Stewardship.

## Curnow Life Interest Donation Breaks New Ground

A Killarney area landowner has taken a novel approach to donating his 240 acre farm for habitat conservation.

At a ceremony held on the property to recognize the donation, Lorne Colpitts, MHHC chief executive officer, said, "This is the first land donation of its kind to MHHC and we are quite excited about it." The ceremony attracted many of Mr. Curnow's friends and neighbours.

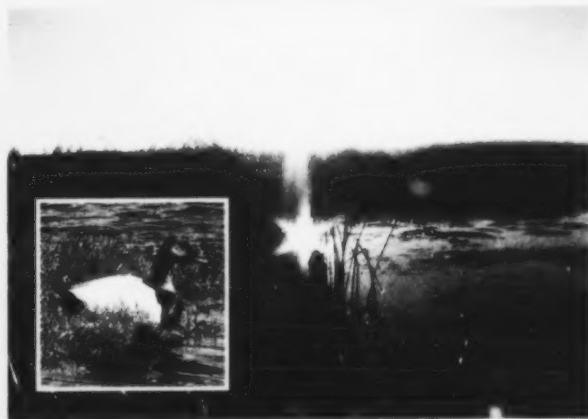
Mr. Curnow's donation, in which he retained a Life Interest, means that he owns the land for the rest of his life. Under the agreement MHHC is identified on the land title and assumes full ownership upon his passing.

Mr. Curnow's appreciation for the natural features of the property helped motivate his decision. "I never took down trees or drained the sloughs," he said.

The property includes cultivated land, wetlands, woodlands, hayland and the banks of the Long River. "A great diversity of wildlife can be found here, including deer, fox, ducks, geese, grouse and many songbirds," said Al Bourrier, MHHC's Killarney field representative.

Bourrier also negotiated MHHC's first Life Interest agreement. "Everyone wins," he said. "Mr. Curnow is recognized now for his generosity and MHHC will ensure the habitat is conserved."

*Adapted from an article in the Killarney Guide.*



## Canart Farm: Walking the Talk

Ryan Canart, Manager of the Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District doesn't just advocate for conservation practices in his District: the farm he's developing with his parents and brother is a living example of his land use ethic.

Canart's goal is a profitable livestock feeding operation that also improves the health and productivity of the land. With just over 2,000 acres of land now, the Canart family grazes feeder cattle from spring through to autumn. The family members have off-farm incomes but they expect that all their land use investments will have a financial pay-off.

In addition to converting all cultivated lands to permanent cover, the Canarts signed perpetual conservation agreements (CAs) on all their wetlands and native upland cover. To date, just over 1,000 acres are in CAs and an additional 300 acres are in process. These CAs, in a NAWMP priority area, will prevent habitat loss but will allow haying and grazing to continue.

Significantly, they've taken the additional step of allowing MHHC, through the Highways Mitigation Fund, to restore 18 acres of drained wetlands with earthen plugs in ditches. A fencing project supported by MHHC's former Riparian Stewardship Program also allows them to control cattle access to a stretch of Bosshill Creek that runs through their pasture.

To Canart, the wetland restorations and other improvements are more than good for the environment. "I expect that the restored wetlands will enhance landscape productivity and will ultimately improve productivity of the livestock operation."

The approach to the farm operation also fits with his role as CD manager. "I should practice what I preach," says Canart. "I wouldn't have much credibility if I did things any other way."

Looking at all the changes, Canart says, "So far, I'm really pleased with the results."



MHHC also has agreements to carry out wetland mitigation activities associated with new construction on Highways 10 and 16 in the NAWMP target area. To date, a total of 59 acres of wetland and associated habitats have been secured under these agreements.

*Turtle Mountain Conservation District Partnership:* Oriented strand board production in Manitoba, Northwestern Ontario and Minnesota, has placed increased harvest pressure on the mainly-wooded slopes of the Turtle Mountain escarpment. Late in 2004/05, MHHC entered into a partnership with the Turtle Mountain Conservation District (TMCD) to deliver

conservation agreements on watershed-sensitive lands. The project continued into 2006/07 and by year end a total of nine CAs were completed on 1,335 acres. In 2006/07 a total of six CAs on 596 acres were completed and one more is in progress.

*Farm Stewardship Association of Manitoba (FSAM):* FSAM is a producer-directed organization established primarily to deliver the Environmental Farm Planning (EFP) program in Manitoba. The EFP program has been initiated under the Environment Chapter of the federal government's Agricultural Policy Framework. The program provides farm families the opportunity to

assess the environmental status of their operations and to adopt beneficial management practices to mitigate any potential adverse effects their activities may have on the environment. A completed EFP allows producers to access cost-shared incentive funding to implement a number of beneficial management practices.

MHHC participates by having membership on FSAM's Board of Directors and participation on FSAM's Communications Committee.

*Regional and National NAWMP Activities:* As coordinating body for NAWMP in Manitoba, MHHC participates in a number of NAWMP committees and activities at the regional and national levels. These include the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture Advisory Board and its Waterfowl Working Group, Policy and Communications committees. MHHC chairs the latter.

Nationally, MHHC is represented at the North American Bird Conservation Initiative/North American Wetlands Conservation Council. MHHC also participates in the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Proposal Writers Working Group.

At the international level, MHHC sits on the NAWMP Plan Committee and participates in the NAWMP Continental Assessment Steering Committee, which is evaluating the effectiveness of NAWMP's 20-year record in all NAWMP Joint Ventures.

## **NAWMP COMMUNICATIONS**

MHHC is responsible for NAWMP communications in Manitoba. Preparation and distribution of news

releases and articles forms a significant portion of that responsibility. Uptake of these articles in the rural and agricultural media continues to be high.

In addition, MHHC made presentations at various meetings and workshops and staffed displays at major agricultural fairs and local events.

### **NAWMP Partner Activities**

*Ducks Unlimited, NAWMP Program:* Ducks Unlimited Canada delivers a range of NAWMP program options, including land lease and purchase, conservation agreements and a range of conservation farming options. These include zero tillage, permanent forage cover establishment, managed grazing and fall-seeded crops.

In 2006/07 a total of 13,449 acres were secured by agreements ranging from 10 years to perpetuity, 12,917 acres of habitat lands were enhanced and a further 39,998 acres were influenced by conservation demonstration or policy adjustment initiatives. Consistent with the new Manitoba Implementation Plan for NAWMP, DUC is focusing more efforts on wetland restoration activities.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is also a NAWMP program delivery partner, focusing on wetland and associated habitats on aspen parkland habitats in western Manitoba especially in lands in the vicinity of Riding Mountain National Park. In 2006/07 it secured six sites through purchase or perpetual CAs for a total of 1,902 habitat acres with funding support from NAWMP sources in the United States.





## Riparian Health Initiative

*Riparian areas are the green corridors along streams, lakes and other water bodies. Vegetation growing in riparian areas helps to slow down floodwaters and trap sediments and pollutants before they enter the water as well being a major reservoir of biological diversity in the prairie landscape. They are key habitats in agricultural areas of Manitoba.*

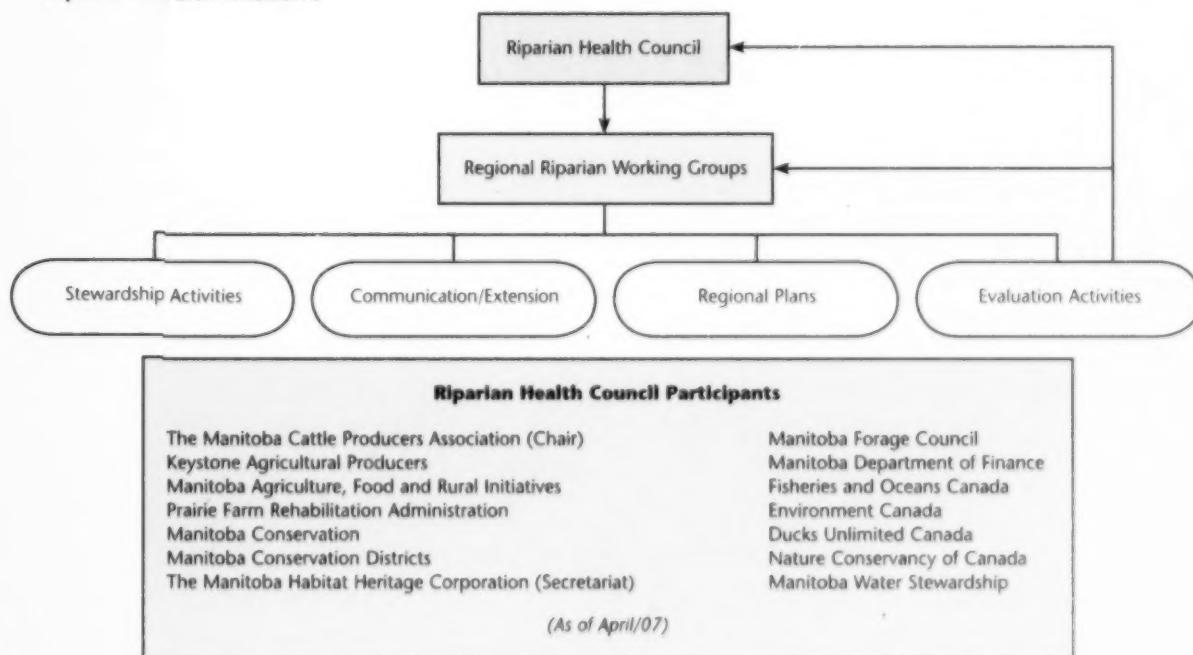
*The Riparian Health Initiative includes a network of agricultural industry and conservation organizations. It has helped to strengthen riparian stewardship programs for producers and improve coordination of other partner activities across Agro Manitoba. In addition to its coordination role, MHHC has focused on delivering riparian extension activities and, more recently, riparian easements in support of objectives for Lake Winnipeg restoration.*

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Riparian Health Initiative (RHI) was launched in 2001 to enhance collaborative approaches for riparian area management across Agro Manitoba. A priority of the program is to increase the capability of agricultural producers to manage riparian areas effectively and sustainably. Through the collective efforts of agricultural and conservation groups, a network for the conservation and enhancement of riparian and associated lands has been established. The program, launched with core funding from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) Agricultural Environmental Sustainability Initiative and delivered through the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council, is now supported primarily from AAFC's Greencover component of the Agriculture Policy Framework as well as the Stewardship-in-Action Fund of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Manitoba Water Stewardship provides funding for the riparian easement component of MHC's suite of riparian activities.

The RHI is facilitated by the Riparian Health Council (RHC), which was created to promote coordinated programs and activities for riparian areas and associated lands in Agro Manitoba. The RHC is chaired by the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association and has membership from producer groups, government agencies and non-government conservation organizations including the MHC. The RHC's coordination activities have helped improve the efficiency and effectiveness of stewardship activities, information and education programs for interested landowners and evaluation activities focusing on riparian issues and program effectiveness. One of MHC's main activities, delivered in the initial phase of the RHI, was cost-shared riparian management projects delivered to individual agricultural producers. This initiative was enabled and co-delivered by a number of RHC partners. That spirit of partnership and joint approaches has carried on with MHC's current riparian activities. Cooperative approaches, focusing on communication, extension and stewardship support, are the building blocks of the RHI.

### Riparian Health Initiative



## A Grand View of Riparian Areas

The Grand Valley Grazing Club and the Mid Assiniboine Conservation District (MARCD) hosted a one-day Managing the Water's Edge (MWE) workshop last June about managing pastures that have riparian areas.

In keeping with the MWE "team" approach, Jane Thornton from Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Dan MacDonald from PFRA and Wes Pankratz and Marilena Kowalchuk from Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation were facilitators. The workshop addressed the importance of healthy streambanks and offered practical management information.

Following a morning classroom session, the group traveled to a pasture on the Little Souris River. By examining the vegetation and other components of the streambank, they learned how to answer the question: "How healthy is my creek?"

Marilena Kowalchuk, MWE coordinator said, "It can be a challenge to get producers to attend a full-day event, but once they come out and hear the information, they tell me the information was useful and valuable, especially gaining the skills to assess the health of their own riparian areas."

Kim Poppel, the manager of MARCD has attended many riparian-related events but noted, "It's the best one I've taken part in."

*Adapted from an article in the Brandon Sun*



## Riparian Grazing: Soup to Nuts

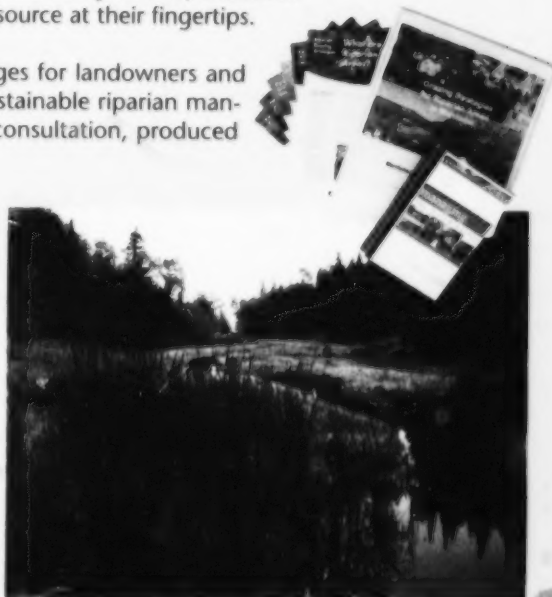
With the printing and distribution of the Riparian Grazing Strategies manual by MHHC, extension and resource management agency personnel have a new riparian resource at their fingertips.

It's a challenge to develop consistent riparian management messages for landowners and managers when there is a diversity of views on what constitutes sustainable riparian management. The MWE team took on this challenge and, after much consultation, produced a manual focusing on grazing.

The manual presents technical information on a range of subjects: riparian basics; grazing plan development; determining stocking rates and carrying capacity; primary productivity; bank stability; water quality; biodiversity; legislation; environmental farm plans and beneficial management practices incentives.

MWE partners do not see the manual as the final word on any of the subjects. Rather, it's a resource for technical personnel that work with farmers and other landowners to understand and communicate principles and practices that are key to sound riparian area management.

While the manual itself targets technical personnel, MWE also produced a companion series of fact sheets for landowners and other audiences. Both have been distributed widely to agricultural and conservation agencies and organizations in Manitoba and beyond.



*Managing the Water's Edge*: RHC partners and MHHC's riparian program coordinator deliver *Managing the Water's Edge* (MWE), a riparian area extension initiative. The initiative is coordinated by MHHC and supported by a team of trained extension personnel from a number of agencies and organizations capable of delivering riparian management workshops. The MWE team is in place to provide agricultural producers and other key audiences with useful information that leads to effective management of riparian and associated lands for the benefit of the environment, rural communities and landowners' bottom lines.

MHHC's riparian program coordinator and other MWE facilitators delivered a total of 33 workshops and presentations to approximately 700 producers and agriculture and conservation agency delivery staff in 2006/07. This is more than double the number of events held the previous year. MWE workshops have three main features: 1) discuss the role and importance of riparian areas in the environment, especially as it relates to water quality; 2) a self-assessment system that producers can use to rate the health of their own riparian areas; and 3) discuss land use practices that can enhance the health of riparian and associated lands. Workshop participants are presented with a Manitoba-based riparian area assessment workbook that is designed to support landowners' land use decision-making.

While the MWE focus is agricultural producers and related extension agency personnel, the MWE concept and core messages have been successfully integrated into Manitoba Education's high school biology curriculum. In 2006/07 MWE has continued to take advantage of opportunities to deliver student workshops, especially with rural schools.

In support of its objective of delivery of consistent riparian management messages among the MWE team, a two-day skills upgrading and strategic planning workshop was provided for field delivery personnel in 2006/07.

Communications products were developed in 2006/07 to support MWE activities. The most important was the Riparian Grazing Strategies manual, a comprehensive document that targets extension agency personnel and provides riparian technical information on subjects ranging from riparian area functions and values to grazing fundamentals, water quality, bank stability and riparian related legislation. Simplified fact sheets were created from a number of the chapters and are designed for distribution to broader audiences.

*Related MWE Activities*: In 2006/07 MHHC staff participated in three Integrated Watershed Management Planning (IWMP) initiatives spearheaded by Manitoba Conservation Districts and Manitoba Water Stewardship: LaSalle River, Seine/Rat River and the Four Watersheds IWMP south of Riding Mountain. In these cases MHHC provided input on the state of riparian lands and programs for State of the Watershed reports in those areas.

In a related area, MHHC is partnering with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Upper Assiniboine River Conservation District in a pilot project designed to develop a cost-effective, remote-sensing based approach to assessing riparian area health. The objective is to develop an inexpensive assessment system to help watershed managers assess riparian health, target future riparian programs and detect riparian health changes as watershed management activities proceed. MHHC will provide field assessments of a pilot watershed and that work will commence in the coming year.





### First Red River Easement a Special Place

When Dr. Jim Mitchell of Winnipeg signed MHC's first riparian conservation agreement (easement) on the Red River, there was satisfaction in knowing that a long-cherished area would remain protected.

"I've seen too much development ruining habitat. I wanted to make sure that this place remained natural," said Mitchell.

'This place' is a 79-acre parcel of riparian forest – mainly ash and oak – on a larger tract of farmland along the Red River south of Winnipeg. The farm was purchased in the 1970s by Jim and his wife Catherine.

The land was a sanctuary for Jim, whose demanding work as an obstetrician/gynecologist included stints teaching at one of Winnipeg's major hospitals. "The farm was a tonic that helped me deal with a hectic medical career," he said.

The property was not a chance selection: it was settled and farmed by Catherine's ancestors in 1891. One of the Mitchells' first priorities was to carefully restore the 1907 farm house. As well, old wagon trails across the property were kept up and became winter ski trails, a bonus for an active family that included four daughters. Their shared experiences made the conservation agreement (CA) option all the easier. "It's a family decision to conserve this land," said Mitchell.

Lorne Colpitts, MHC Chief Executive Officer, said, "This is one of the largest blocks of privately owned forest remaining along the Red River. We are fortunate to have funding from Manitoba Water Stewardship to begin purchasing conservation agreements on these areas."

Although now an octogenarian and a widower, hardly a week goes by without Jim driving from Winnipeg to spend time on the farm. After four decades, he can predict the waves of spring migrants, be they flickers, finches or tundra swans, within a few days of arrival. His relationship with the abundant deer is a little ambivalent: "I love to watch them. I just wish they would leave my garden alone!" he said with a wry smile. The farm continues to be a tonic that enriches his life.

Over the years the family has kept strong roots in the local community and Jim's conservation example has been noticed. Some of his farming neighbours are now pursuing CAs with MHC to protect riparian woodlands on their property.



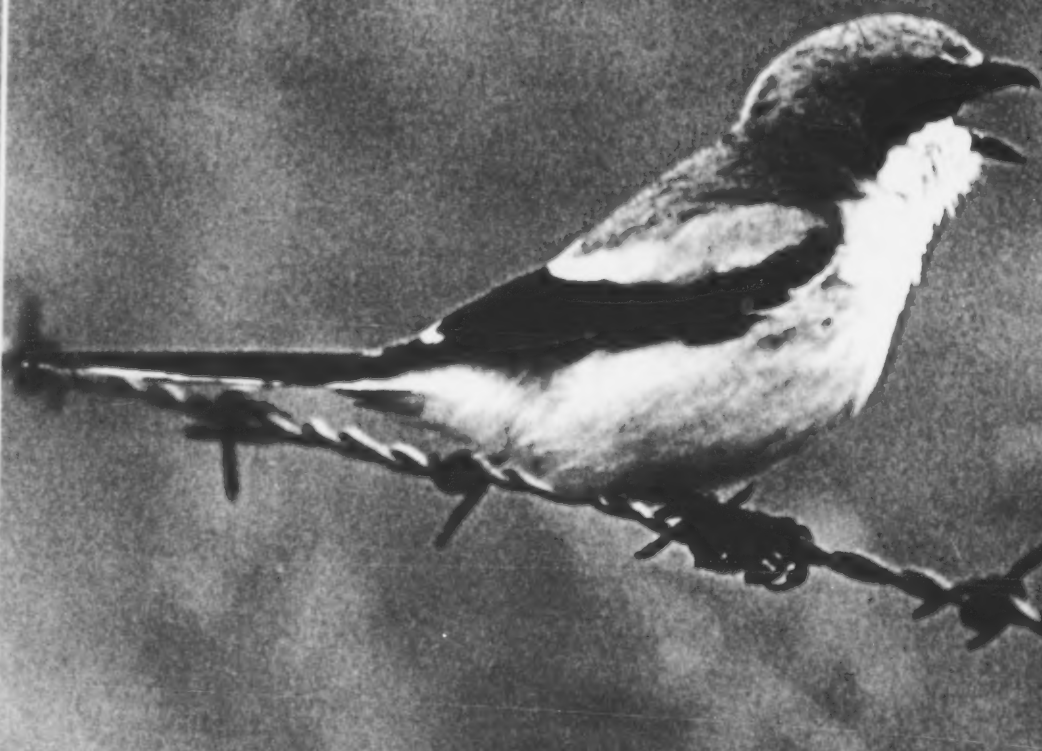
### ***Riparian Conservation Agreement (Easement) Program***

MHHC received new funding from Manitoba Water Stewardship late in 2004/05 and in 2006/07 to deliver perpetual conservation agreements (CAs) to protect intact riparian habitats on watercourses in the Lake Winnipeg watershed. Given the importance of healthy riparian areas in maintaining surface water quality, this is an investment in the health of Lake Winnipeg as well as biodiversity conservation in the agricultural landscape.

In 2006/07 MHHC field staff made substantial progress, completing a total of 10 riparian CAs on 861 acres of habitat. At year end an additional five riparian CAs were in progress on 232 acres.

While CAs can be used to secure priority riparian habitats on waterways entering Lake Winnipeg, MHHC focused on the Red River and its immediate tributaries in 2006/07. In addition to contributing to objectives for Lake Winnipeg restoration, protection of remaining Red River native riparian habitats also contributes to the shared goal of Manitoba, North Dakota and Minnesota to establish a Greenway – a corridor of conserved riverbank habitats – on the Red River from its headwaters to Lake Winnipeg.

MHHC stimulated uptake of riparian CAs along the Red River through presentations to rural municipal councils south of Winnipeg and direct contacts with key landowners. Response has been favourable and interest from landowners in the CA option continues to be encouraging.



## Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk

*Canada's Species at Risk initiative includes a fund to support stewardship projects for threatened and endangered wildlife and plant species. This is the seventh year that the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (HSP) has been available for Manitoba habitat projects. MHHC delivers HSP conservation activities directly and administers HSP funds on behalf of other delivery organizations.*

## INTRODUCTION

The federal Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) was created in 2000 as the Species at Risk Act was being developed. Involving Environment Canada, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the HSP's objective is to support voluntary, stewardship-based approaches to protecting habitat for species at risk. The emphasis is on activities that will conserve or enhance habitat for species identified as being endangered, threatened or of special concern. Manitoba efforts are focused largely in agriculturally developed regions, where habitat loss has been the most significant.

### *MHHC Projects*

MHHC's contribution to HSP is long-term protection of habitat required by species at risk in the agricultural landscape through purchased conservation agreements (CAs). All HSP CA lands must be associated with species of concern identified by the Committee On the Status of Endangered Wildlife In Canada (COSEWIC). Priority habitats in Manitoba have been identified through historical and ongoing surveys of species of concern. Priority habitats:

- 1) Native mixed-grass prairie, which has been reduced to remnant stands in southwestern Manitoba, is important for conserving declining native plant and grassland wildlife populations. Plant species of concern include buffalograss, smooth goosefoot and small white lady's-slipper. The northern prairie skink, loggerhead shrike and Sprague's pipit are also species at risk.

- 2) Riparian habitats in the Assiniboine River basin are also a priority, where the aquatic species of concern are carmine shiner, bigmouth buffalo, chestnut lamprey and silver chub.

- 3) Other habitats for specific plant and animal species that have been identified as being at risk. Examples of such species include western spiderwort, hairy prairie-clover, red-headed woodpecker and yellow rail.

A total of 107 CAs, totaling 23,315 acres, have been completed since MHHC began working through the HSP. Since inception, the program has spent \$1.69 million on CAs, funds that have gone directly to farmers and other rural landowners.

In 2006/07, 15 conservation agreements were completed on 3,923 acres of land under the HSP. Those included 14 CAs on 3,828 acres of mixed grass prairie and one CA on 95 acres of riparian habitats.

At year-end, two additional CAs, representing 173 acres, were in process.

### *Other HSP Activities*

MHHC assists other Manitoba partners, especially Manitoba Conservation, by managing HSP agreements and administering the employment contracts of term and seasonal employees that are supervised by Manitoba Conservation staff. Projects that are being assisted include: mixed-grass prairie grazing project; mixed-grass prairie inventory; species at risk inventory; northern prairie skink inventory; parkland habitat partnership, piping plovers; and woodland caribou habitat stewardship.



### **Conservation Agreement a Fit With Ranching Operation and Family Values**

There is plenty to gain from protecting the habitat on your ranch or farm according to Shawne Hagan, a rancher with several conservation agreements (CAs) on his land. If you enjoy ranching, chances are you will also enjoy nature as the two often go hand-in-hand.

"It has been a good thing," said Shawne, referring to the CAs on the family ranch south of Virden. "They don't interfere with our farming operation one little bit."

"It is very good I think," said his wife Jocelyn, "and it is something we had wanted to do for a long time anyway."

Shawne and Jocelyn have two CAs. One protects wetlands and woodlands while the second covers two sections of native pasture. The latter CA was purchased through the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk. This type of habitat is home to several species of concern such as Baird's sparrow, Sprague's pipit and burrowing owl.

"It worked out nicely for us and now the land will be protected forever," Shawne said.

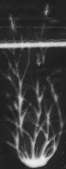
Shawne and Jocelyn run a 600-head cow/calf Angus herd and raise and train horses as well. It is a family operation that also involves their two sons. Their oldest son, Alistair, and his wife, Erin, have their own ranching operation nearby. Their youngest son Thomas and partner Felicity are also involved.

"The Hagans have found a balance between ranching economics and maintaining habitat for wildlife," said Curtis Hullick, MHHC's Reston field representative.

In conjunction with the CAs, they have also received help from MHHC staff through the Mixed-Grass Prairie Grazing Project. This has resulted in a modification to their grazing methods, which has helped increase cattle weight gains.

These conservation-minded ranchers have also managed cattle access to their riparian areas and water supplies by undertaking riparian fencing and off-site watering.

Ranching is their livelihood, but it is also an important part of their lifestyle. The land offers recreation and social benefits such as providing hunting opportunities, an important family activity. Keeping the habitat was the right decision for them because they enjoy all these aspects of ranch life.



## Critical Wildlife Habitat Program

*The goal of the Critical Wildlife Habitat Program (CWHP) is to identify, preserve and manage remaining critical habitats, especially native grassland habitats of unique, rare and endangered species. Manitoba Conservation, MHHC and other agencies work together under the CWHP umbrella on a project-specific basis. MHHC holds a number of acquired habitat lands in trust on behalf of CWHP partners.*



## MIXED-GRASS PRAIRIE PROJECTS

With over 75% of the original prairie converted to other uses since the beginning of European settlement, inventories and grazing management demonstration projects continued as priorities on remaining native prairie sites in the mixed-grass prairie region in southwestern Manitoba.

In 2006/07 mixed-grass prairie habitats in southwestern Manitoba continued to be monitored to assess the quality of the remaining prairie. This work is helping to target priority sites for future prairie conservation activities. A total of 86 sites and 15,322 acres were inventoried, with an emphasis on revisits to higher quality prairies previously inventoried. That analysis found that 75% of those sites had similar or improved quality when compared to the first inspection, while the remaining sites declined. The main reasons for declines were overgrazing, leafy spurge infestation and manure applications. Since inception, a total of 180,000 acres of prairie have been inventoried.

The ongoing Mixed-Grass Prairie Grazing Project continued to highlight the benefits of prairie-friendly grazing systems that can enhance grassland biodiversity as well as improve pasture and livestock production. The particular system advocated is called the "twice-over" grazing system, so named because it involves two grazing periods for each pasture in the system. Project activities included monitoring of livestock weight gains on test pastures, tours and workshops. The project also provides cost-shared incentives to landowners willing to implement twice-over systems as demonstration projects. In 2006/07 seven landowners signed agreements to set up the twice-over system

on 2,192 acres of native grasslands. A total of 35 demonstration projects, affecting 14,188 acres of native range, are now in operation.

Funding for both projects was provided by Manitoba Conservation and Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (HSP).

## URBAN HABITAT STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

The Naturescape sub-committee of the Capital Region Habitat Steering Committee, comprised of representatives from Manitoba Conservation, Manitoba Naturalists Society, the City of Winnipeg and Environment Canada, co-ordinated production of the Manitoba *Naturescape* document, which was published and distributed to retailers in 2006/07. The book includes an information package on native species and project ideas to assist the transformation of small plots, including backyards, into habitat.

## TALL GRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE

MHHC continued to be a part of the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve Management Committee along with Manitoba Conservation, Manitoba Naturalists Society, Environment Canada and Nature Conservancy of Canada. Activities at the Preserve, including monitoring species of interest, inventories of new properties and habitat management (including managed burns on 1,680 acres of grassland) were supported by Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Fund for Species At Risk, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Manitoba Conservation and the Manitoba Naturalists Society.



## **Grazing Projects an Easy Sell**

Who would be better to promote a grazing management system than a livestock producer who is using it?

The CWWP's Mixed-Grass Prairie Grazing Project is in that fortunate position. Its grazing technician, Dan Boulanger, farms with his brother, Mark and his parents, Gaston and Nicole, in an area of southwestern Manitoba originally settled by his great, great grandfather. The family operations have coalesced around organic food production; the farms and cattle herds are certified organic.

As Grazing Project cooperators, the Boulanger family had direct experience with the "twice-over" grazing system promoted by the program. Ongoing monitoring of their demonstration pastures found that cattle weight gains, stocking rates and grassland diversity have all improved.

Good fortune was smiling all around when the program was looking for a technician and Dan, an Agriculture Diploma graduate from the University of Manitoba, was available.

"I was fortunate to find a job close to home in a field that I'm interested in," said Boulanger. "With my interests in agriculture and the environment, this job falls into my way of thinking."

Having Boulanger, who's on contract with MHHC, talk to other producers about a system that's working for his family is a tremendous asset. Showing typical rural humility, he said, "I think that my own experiences help to sell the program."

The grazing program is funded by Environment Canada's Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.







## NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration)

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Environment Canada-Canadian Wildlife Service

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

Manitoba Conservation

Manitoba Water Stewardship

Delta Waterfowl Foundation

Keystone Agricultural Producers

Manitoba Conservation Districts

Nature Conservancy of Canada

## RIPARIAN HEALTH INITIATIVE

The Manitoba Cattle Producers Association

Keystone Agricultural Producers

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration)

Manitoba Water Stewardship

Manitoba Conservation

Manitoba Conservation Districts Association

Manitoba Forage Council

Manitoba Department of Finance

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Environment Canada

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Nature Conservancy of Canada

## CRITICAL WILDLIFE HABITAT PROGRAM

Manitoba Conservation

Manitoba Naturalists Society

Nature Conservancy of Canada

Wildlife Habitat Canada

Environment Canada - Canadian Wildlife Service

Nature Conservancy of Canada







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### **PRODUCTION NOTES:**

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